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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000088

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-16-14

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SUBJECT: Potential alliance between radical JVP and the President's party causes concern over political impasse

Refs: Colombo 73, and previous

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: A long-negotiated accord between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party and the extremist, Marxist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna party is scheduled to finally be signed on January 20. There is little information on the exact nature of the proposed accord and how it addresses the on-going peace process with the Tigers. The proposed SLFP-JVP alliance is not being welcomed by Tamil politicians. The result of such an alliance on the PM-President political impasse is not clear, but will likely serve to increase the President's political leverage and would indicate that elections are in the cards. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ACCORD FINALLY SCHEDULED FOR SIGNING: A long-negotiated accord between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), the major constituent of the Opposition People's Alliance (PA) and the extremist, Marxist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party is scheduled to finally be signed on January 20. A January 14 press release, in the name of the Maithripala Sirisena, SLFP general secretary, and Tilvin Silva, JVP general secretary,

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defines the impending SLFP-JVP linkup, resulting from ten months of discussions, as a "historic political alliance," that is "essential to resurrect the country." According to the release, Sirisena and Silva will sign the pact for their respective parties, at a reportedly elaborate ceremony be planned for the morning of January 20.

3. (C) There is little information on the exact nature of the proposed accord: reports refer to an anticipated memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the two parties, but it is not clear what that would encompass. During the recent discussions between the two parties, major disagreements regarding a final resolution to the conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have kept the SLFP and JVP from reaching an agreement. President Kumaratunga, and her SLFP, supports the idea of a devolution of power in a final negotiated resolution with the Tigers. The JVP has long rejected such a solution and remains a frequent antagonist of the current peace process. In a January 16 conversation, Vijitha Herath, JVP MP, told us that the JVP still advocates some power sharing at the provincial level only, but that both parties supported a country-wide referendum to determine the ultimate solution for the conflict. Also on January 16, Dinesh Gunawardena, PA MP, confirmed Herath's comments to us, saying that the JVP had agreed to a negotiated political settlement with the LTTE, to be finalized in a national referendum.

4. (C) At the least, the alliance will be an electoral one with a unifying political symbol and banner. The combined parliamentary strength of the two parties -- the SLFP's 72 seats plus the JVP's 16 seats -- will still be less than the government's United National Front (UNF) majority of 114 parliamentary seats. While there is no public call from either the SLFP or JVP for national elections at the moment, the alliance will most likely strengthen both sides going into the April Provincial Council elections.

5. (C) OPPOSITION FROM TAMIL POLITICIANS: The proposed SLFP-JVP alliance is not being welcomed by Tamil politicians. In separate January 16 conversations, N. Raviraj and Gajen Ponnambalam, Tamil National Alliance MPs from Jaffna, expressed to us their opposition to the SLFP-JVP alliance and ensuing worry over the peace process. Raviraj predicted that the Tigers will not favor the JVP's terms for a solution and that the President and her SLFP will be the losers in the end. Concurrent with the announcement of the alliance, however, the LTTE has come out publicly in continued

support of the ceasefire. The pro-LTTE website "TamiNet" reported that during a January 13 meeting with Norwegian special peace envoy Erik Solheim in London, LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham stated that the LTTE reiterated its commitment to maintaining the ceasefire. LTTE political leader S.P. Thamilselvan relayed the same message to Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar during Brattskar's January 13 visit to the Tigers' stronghold in Kilinochchi, also according to press reports.

16. (C) COMMENT: The SLFP and JVP have publicly announced imminent dates several times in the past months for the finalization and signing of their alliance. This latest announcement is the most serious and, according to our contacts, almost certain to occur. Should the accord get signed on January 20, the effect on the on-going political impasse between the President and Prime Minister is worrisome, since the pact strongly increases the chances of parliamentary elections. While the President remains committed to the peace process, it is not clear how she will honor her publicly stated intent to resolve issues with the PM in the wake of her new political leverage. END COMMENT

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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